

Dear friends,

This week we shall be thinking about the work of prayer and how we relate to God through persistent prayer. Jesus tells a striking and challenging parable in which a widow pesters a judge until he issues a judgement in her favour – Jesus suggests that if an unjust judge would reward persistence, how much more will God respond to the needs of his faithful! While we may be conditioned in these days to expect everything at the click of a button, God's timetable is planned more carefully. Prayer is a long-term commitment. God's response is unfailing – it might not be what we think we need or want, it may take some time in coming but respond He does for our good.

Every blessing, Margaret

Call to worship:

'Ask, and it shall be given to you; search and you will find, knock and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds – and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.' [Matthew 7:7-8]

'Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.' [1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18]

'Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.' [James 5:16]

Come, let us worship and pray for God's grace. May we always keep praying and never lose heart. In our worship, may God build up our faith and strengthen our resolve to pray and to wait for the answer. Amen.

The words to 'Father, hear the prayer we offer' written by Love Maria Willis [1824-1908] StF 518

1 Father, hear the prayer we offer: not for ease that prayer shall be,
but for strength that we may ever live our lives courageously.

2 Not for ever in green pastures do we ask our way to be;
but the steep and rugged pathway may we tread rejoicingly.

3 Not for ever by still waters would we idly rest and stay;
but would strike the living fountains from the rocks along our way.

4 Be our strength in hours of weakness, in our wanderings be our guide;
through endeavour, failure, danger, Father, be there at our side.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you that you are our place of help.

Where others fail us and circumstances change, you remain and you are unchanging.

Your love supports us, underpinning us with a strength beyond ourselves.

We praise you for your passion for justice, for your kindness towards your people.

We thank you that you call us to a life-giving existence, that we may give and receive in your name, learning your ways and caring for your world. Amen.

We have no time, no time, no time, and rushing here and there we easily forget you, gracious God.

Too readily we treat others badly in what we say and do.

Then, too, we often do nothing when others need our love, our help, our hope.

It is the busy bustle that brings us to our knees, instead of you.

Yet you, in still, small ways, call us to pray, and pray, and pray again.

Forgive us, loving God, for being centred on ourselves. Remind us of your love for us, and as we mark the path to your kingdom, make us more than mere flickering lights, in Jesus Christ who loves us.

Amen.

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Loving God, we know you hear us and that you not only hear us but you accept us as your children, surrounding us with grace and forgiveness.

Thank you for your unconditional love. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Luke 18: 1-8. [New Revised Standard Version Bible. Copyright 1989]

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said: 'In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, "Grant me justice against my opponent." For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'

And the Lord said: 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?'

Comment:

The parable of the nagging widow and the stubborn judge illustrates the gap between those on the margins of society who are seeking justice and those in positions of power. But the widow has staying-power!!

A widow tries to bridge the gap by nagging away at the man in power, the unjust judge. He is shameless – at least in his dealings with poor human beings, preferring the rich who could give him a hefty bribe. He operates in a society where avoidance of shame and the maintaining of public respectability are part of the culture of the elite. Moreover, God does not feature in his reckoning. The judge comes over as a hardened character, interested in [and talking only about] himself.

The widow is no softie either. She has threatened him with a black eye if he doesn't listen! The Greek word *hypopiazein*, translated as 'wear me out', literally means this. But it can also mean 'damaging my character' and this *would* bother the judge. He has been appointed by the ruling, educated elite to keep control of the law and maintain the status quo. Being self-centred he eventually gives in when it dawns on him that his own health and security are threatened by the woman's persistent dedication to justice.

She knows her rights and will not be intimidated by anyone in power, no matter how long it takes. She will not pull her punches where fairness and justice are at stake.

Jesus obviously admires such a resilient character.

Two comments are made on the story. Firstly, the interpretation of the parable would suggest that if a dishonest judge will finally listen to a petition, how much more willingly and quickly will a loving God respond to the prayer of a disciple.

But secondly, there is a warning – the disciple must not lose heart if the Son of Man delays his return. Jesus wonders if he will find his followers still persevering in faith and prayer, or will they have lost heart because they have become the sort of people who expect instant fulfilment of their desires?

Meditation of Andrew. [A Most Amazing Man {year C} by Nick Fawcett. Copyright 2009 Nick Fawcett]

They came as a relief, those words of his, for I'm as guilty as any, tending to badger God in prayer, refusing to take no for an answer. I'd been wondering if that was wrong, if God would get sick and tired of the same old refrain day after day, perhaps even ignore me as a result, so I'd resolved to give it a rest lest I test his patience too far.

Only I couldn't have been more wrong, as Jesus brought home so clearly in that wonderful parable of his.

I thought, at first, he was likening God to some reprobate judge – some cantankerous old so-and-so who, though reluctant to hear, can finally be worn down if we persist long enough – but that wasn't the point at all, for Jesus wasn't so much comparing as *contrasting* God, emphasising that the two couldn't be more different.

Though we may not realise it, God is *always* listening – *always* looking to respond – *always* eager to grant his blessing; so if he doesn't seem to answer, it's not because he doesn't want to, still less that we've asked too often, but because his reply is yet to come.

It may not be today, or tomorrow, or the day after that – but never be afraid to ask and ask again, for if anyone delights to hear and promises to answer it is surely *him*.

Prayer:

Thank you, Lord, that though we struggle in prayer, finding ourselves lost for words, or endlessly repeating ourselves, always you listen, never tired of hearing us.

Teach us, then, to persevere, looking for your answer till it becomes clear – not necessarily the response we hope for, but always the reply we need. Amen.

A Prayer for Justice:

God of the nations, so many of your children are crying out – worn down by the burden of debt – brought to their knees by unfair trade.

We pray for justice and look for a world where all shall have life in all its fullness.

Help us in the decisions we make daily to remember those who are poor – and to act, where we can, to bring hope and healing for others.

In Nazareth, Jesus, you read the Scriptures, telling you that you had been anointed to bring good news to the poor, recovery of sight to the blind, and to let captives go free.

Make us bearers of good news – help us bring sight and liberation to people oppressed by an unjust world.

Holy Spirit, you fill us with love, with faith and hope.

Make us active servants and followers, ready always to pray and pray again that justice may be done, and that your kingdom may come on this earth, as in heaven.

Like the waters, may your justice flow – like everlasting streams, may your righteousness flood the earth.

Help us to dig new channels for your refreshing goodness so that those who thirst from despair may drink, and those who are soiled by life's woes may be made clean.

Come among us, God of love, come among us we pray. Amen.

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The words to 'Father, I place into your hands' written by Jenny Hewer [b.1945]

StF 519

1 Father, I place into your hands the things I cannot do.

Father, I place into your hands the times that I've been through.

Father, I place into your hands the way that I should go,
for I know I always can trust you.

2 Father, I place into your hands my friends and family.

Father, I place into your hands the things that trouble me.

Father, I place into your hands the person I would be,
for I know I always can trust you.

3 Father, we love to see your face, we love to hear your voice.

Father, we love to sing your praise and in your name rejoice.

Father, we love to walk with you and in your presence rest,
for we know we always can trust you.

4 Father, I want to be with you and do the things you do.

Father, I want to speak the words that you are speaking too.

Father, I want to love the ones that you will draw to you,
for I know that I am one with you.

Close:

Lord, sometimes I find it hard to see the blessing in my struggles, when I am tired and discouraged and lonely.

I find it hard to keep praying when I feel stale and tired and defeated.

Grant me the energy, the faith and the perseverance of the widow, that I may rejoice again, in Jesus' name. Amen.

May you find peace in your praying and blessing in your struggling.

May you bring blessing to everyone you meet.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

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